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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BF](#)
SUBJECT: BAHAMAS: CRIME CONCERNS SIMMER AS ECONOMY SOFTENS

REF: A. 08 NASSAU 71
[1](#)B. NASSAU 13
[1](#)C. NASSAU 64
[1](#)D. 07 NASSAU 1458
[1](#)E. NASSAU 38

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires, a.i. Dubel for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Increasing crime remains a major concern as the tourism-based economy weakens, though year-on-year crime figures show violent crime dipping slightly as property crimes rise. The GCOB has implemented measures aimed at improving the criminal justice system, but the impact is not likely to be felt quickly. While local media carry a steady stream of sometimes-shocking violent crime reports, official anxiety about a U.S. travel advisory affecting tourism has waned. Prominent public figures continue to point to deep-seated social causes for crime, indicating that no end is in sight for high crime rates. The potential for a high-profile incident leading to a public relations disaster for the tourism sector remains. END SUMMARY.

2008 Crime Statistics Show Increase in
Many Categories

[1](#)2. (U) Increasing crime remains a major concern in The Bahamas (ref A), especially after a wave of hotel sector layoffs and a general weakening of the tourism-based economy (ref B). Official police statistics for 2008 show that property crimes increased in several categories nationwide and on the island of New Providence, which represents two-thirds of the population, fuelling an overall 9% increase in reported crime. Most categories of violent crime, such as murder and rape, dropped slightly, both nationally and on New Providence. That decline eased alarm about a record-breaking spike in 2007, though the murder count remained high at 72. The reduction from 78 in 2007 hardly seems a cause for rejoicing (the equivalent number in 2006: 60 murders).

[1](#)3. (U) Notably, robbery and armed robbery increased both nationally and on New Providence in 2008, even as other forms of violent crime decreased slightly. The overall statistical trend was far more pronounced in the outlying islands, where violent crime) still rare enough to be a shock when it occurs) was generally stable year-on-year, while property crime, i.e. different forms of theft, skyrocketed, albeit from a small numerical base. Incidents at least doubled in 3 of 5 categories recorded by police, with house- and shop-breaking, by far the most common types of crime, &only8 increasing by 65% and 41% respectively

[1](#)4. (U) The GCOB has implemented several measures aimed at improving the criminal justice system in the long term, such as passing plea bargaining legislation, increasing penalties for sexual offenses, and streamlining the police leadership (ref C). None of the measures, however, seem to strike at

the roots or causes of crime, nor will they have any impact on the crime rate in the short term. Official detection rates for property crime remain abysmal, hovering around 10% over the last two years, indicating that for quiet a few people crime in The Bahamas actually does pay. The murder detection rate also declined in 2008, meaning fewer murders were solved even as fewer were committed. The criminal justice system remains overloaded and struggles to cope with the volume of cases entering the docket (ref D).

2009) Twelve Murders and Counting

15. (U) Events so far in 2009 are not encouraging. Daily news bulletins are full of violent crime stories) the shooting of a policeman February 17, a fatal stabbing on Valentine,s Day, or a weekend shooting outside a downtown nightspot. The last incident, the twelfth murder recorded this year, occurred in the wee hours of the morning, but only a short walk from the Embassy, in an area frequently transited by tourists moving between the downtown shopping district, the Cable Beach hotel strip, and the beaches in between. The shooting also prompted complaints from a small hotel owner concerned about the impact on his bookings, prompting exhaustive coverage in all daily newspapers. That small businessman,s worry is a microcosm of the country,s dilemma, undoubtedly, if privately shared by executives at the major hotel complexes, all of whom have dealt with the fall-out of violent criminal incidents in close proximity of their properties in the last year or so.

16. (U) A pair of high-speed car chases by police through residential areas on opposite sides of the island have also raised eyebrows in the New Year. One car chase ended in a crash in a middle-class waterfront area dotted with financial houses and yacht clubs, culminating in a shoot-out with police that left residents bewildered. The incident ended at a major traffic junction, next to a public park, mere blocks from a compound housing a number of Embassy families. The public outcry seems particularly sharp and anguished, as in this case, when crime spills out of the usual down-on-their-luck inner city neighborhoods, which see most violent crime incidents and to which most violent crime is still usually limited. The high incidence of gun crimes, in a country with strict gun controls on the books, is a serious concern for police and society at large.

17. (U) While much violent crime is connected to the drug trade and related gang activity, prominent public figures continue to point to the need to address other deep-seated social problems, which are widely accepted as key contributing factors to high crime rates (ref D). A minister, former gang member and social activist points to chronic social problems such as drug use and teen pregnancy, high incarceration rates, and a general sense of hopelessness as fuelling gang-related activity among youth. The Minister of Education never fails to cite the prevalence of single-parent families, headed by women, as a glaring feature of contemporary Bahamian society. The president of the College of The Bahamas bemoans poor educational achievement, especially under-achievement at the post-secondary level compared to the U.S. or Canada (to which The Bahamas is often compared in terms of economic achievement). The President of the Senate cites these and other social problems as contributing to the pressing plight of black boys and young men, who comprise the vast majority of incarcerated persons.

17. (C) COMMENT: Against the background of economic crisis, the crime numbers, trends, and daily headlines, as well as the expressions of concern about the state of society, all indicate that no end is in sight to high crime rates in The Bahamas. Major media covered the official release of 2008 crime statistics without the near-hysteria that accompanied the release of similar crime numbers in late 2007, perhaps indicating that the constant crime headlines are fed more by the need to sell newspapers than anything else. Official and public anxiety about a U.S. travel advisory brought on by

high crime, which would negatively affect the all-important tourism sector, appears to have abated. Very real, negative economic news may have displaced speculation about the theoretical impact of crime on tourism as the economy sharply declined of its own accord. The potential for a high-profile violent crime tragedy and ensuing media disaster, however, such as those witnessed in other Caribbean island destinations recently, has not significantly diminished.

DUBEL